

Common Dandelion

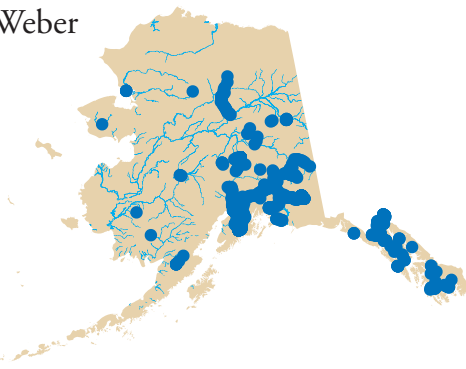
Taraxacum officinale G.H. Weber
ex Wiggers ssp. *officinale*

Alternate names

blow ball, faceclock, pee-a-bed,
wet-a-bed, lion's-tooth, canker-
wort, Irish daisy

Synonyms

Taraxacum atroglaucum M.P. Christens.,
Taraxacum campylodes Hagl., *Taraxacum*
croceum auct. non Dahlst., *Taraxacum*
curvidens M.P. Christens., *Taraxacum*
cyclocentrtrum M.P. Christens., *Taraxacum*
dahlstedtii Lindb. f., *Taraxacum davidssonii*
M.P. Christens., *Taraxacum devians*
Dahlst., *Taraxacum dilutisquameum* M.P.
Christens., *Taraxacum firmum* Dahlst.,
Taraxacum islandiciforme Dahlst., *Taraxa-*
cum kok-saghyz auct. non Rodin, *Taraxa-*
cum officinale G.H. Weber ex Wiggers
var. *palustre* (Lyons) Blytt p.p., *Taraxacum*
pleniflorum M.P. Christens., *Taraxacum retroflexum* Lindb.
f., *Taraxacum rhodolepis* Dahlst., *Taraxacum undulatum*
Lindb. f. & Marklund, *Taraxacum vegans* Hagl., *Taraxacum*
xanthostigma Lindb. f.



US Geological Survey photo by Chris McKee

Description

Common dandelion can grow from 2–20 inches high. Leaves are 2–16 inches long, ½–4 inches broad, and pinnately-lobed to pinnatifid with a large, rounded terminal lobe. Leaves are stalkless. The midrib of the leaf is often hollow and winged near the base. Yellow flowerheads are composed only of ray florets and rise from the basal leaves on hollow stalks. Heads measure 1–2 inches across and are surrounded by two rows of floral bracts. The whole plant contains a white milky juice.

Similar Species

The genus *Taraxacum* is a taxonomically confusing group, due to asexual reproduction and local diversification, and has been subject to many divergent interpretations, with hundreds of specific names published. Current taxonomic treatments describe *T. officinale* as encompassing three subspecies, two introduced in Alaska (ssp. *officinale* and ssp. *vulgare* (Lam.) Schinz & R. Keller) and one native (ssp. *ceratophorum* (Ledeb.) Schinz ex Thellung) in the state (NRCS 2005). The exotic subspecies lack horns on the involucre bracts and have substantially larger heads than all native subspecies and species of Alaskan dandelions. The native subspecies *ceratophorum* often grows in disturbed sites with the introduced subspecies but has horns on the involucre bracts. There are other native *Taraxacum* species that lack horns on involucre bracts, but they are found primarily in undisturbed herbaceous meadows, especially in the alpine zone.



National Park Service photo by Penny Bauder

Management

Hand-pulling is only effective for dandelion control if all rootcrowns are removed, which can be accomplished using an inexpensive, prong-shaped tool (available at garden supply stores) to extract several inches of subsurface material. Dandelion can be easily controlled using herbicides.

Notes

One of the most common weeds in North America, common dandelion has edible leaves, it can be used to make wine, and the milky juice of the roots has medicinal value. Bees use the nectar to make honey, and songbirds eat the seeds.

Family: Asteraceae

Common Dandelion



National Park Service photo by Penny Bauer

Close-up of the involucre bracts of the exotic subspecies; note the absence of horns on upper bracts and the downward-pointing lower bracts.